

THANNE may ye understonde by strengre resons that if thou hast power to parfoune a werk of which thou shalt repente, thanne is it better that thou suffre than bigynne. Wel seyn they, that defenden every wight to assaye any thyng of which he is in doute, whether he may parfoune it or no. And after, whan ye han examyned youre conseil, as I have seyd bifore, and knowen wel that ye may parfoune youre emprise, conferme it thanne sadly til it be at an ende.

IS it resoun & tyme that I shewe yow, whanne & wherefore that ye may chaunge youre conseilours withouten youre repreve. Soothly, a man may chaungen his purpos and his conseil if the cause cesseth, or whan a newe caas bitydeth; for the lawe seith: that Upon thynges that newly bityden bihoveth newe conseil. And Senec seith: If thy conseil is comen to the ceris of thyn enemy, chaunge thy conseil. Thou mayst also chaunge thy conseil if so be that thou fynde that, by errour or by oother cause, harm or damage may bityde. Also, if thy conseil be dishonest, or ellis cometh of dishoneste cause, chaunge thy conseil; for the lawes seyn: that Alle bihestes that been dishoneste been of no value; and eek, if it so be that it be impossible, or may nat goodly be parfourned or kept.

AND take this for a general reule, that every conseil that is affirmid so strongly that it may nat be chaunged, for no condicioun that may bityde, I seye that thilke conseil is wikked.

THIS Melibee, whanne he hadde herd the doctrine of his wyf, dame Prudence, answerde in this wyse. Dame, quod he, as yet in to this tyme ye han wel and covenably taught me as in general how I shal governe me in the chesynge and in the witholdynge of my conseilours. But now wolde I fayn that ye wolde condescende in especial, and telle me how liketh yow, or what semeth yow byoure conseilours that we han chosen in oure present nede.

MY lord, quod she, I biseke yow in al humblesse, that ye wol nat wilfully replie agayn my resouns, ne distempre youre herte, thogh I speke thyng that yow displese. For God woot that as in myn entente, I speke it for youre beste, for youre honour, & for youre profite eek; and soothly, I hope that youre benygnytee wol taken it in pacience. Trusteth me wel, quod she, that youre conseil as in this caas ne sholde nat, as to speke properly, be called a conseil, but a mocion or a moevyng of folye; in which conseil ye han erred in many a sondry wise.

FIRST and forward, ye han erred in thassemblyng of youre conseilours; for ye sholde first have cleped a fewe folk to youre conseil, & after ye myghte han shewed it to mo folk, if it hadde been nede. But certes, ye han so deynly cleped to youre conseil a greet multitude of peple, ful chargeant & ful anyous for to heere. Also, ye han erred, for thereas ye sholden oonly have cleped to youre conseil youre trewe frendes olde & wise, ye han ycleped straunge folk, and yong folk, false flateres and enemys reconsiled, & folk that doon yow reverence withouten love. And eek also ye have erred, for ye han broght with yow to youre conseil, ire, covetise, and hastifnesse; the whiche thre thynges been contrarious to every conseil honeste and profitable; the whiche thre ye han nat anientissed or destroyed hem, neither in youre self ne in youre conseilours, as yow oghte. Ye han erred also, for ye han shewed to youre conseilours youre talent and youre affeccioun to make werre anon, and for to do vengeance. They han espyed by youre wordes to what thyng ye been enclyned; and therefore han they rather consailed yow to youre talent than to youre profit.

E han erred also, for it semeth that it suffiseth to han been consailed by thise conseilours oonly, & with litel avys; whereas in so greet and so heigh a nede, it hadde been necessarie mo conseilours, and moore deliberacioun to parfoune youre emprise.

E han erred also, for ye han nat examyned youre conseil in the forseide manere, ne in due manere as the caas requireth. Ye han erred also, for ye han nat makid no divisoun bitwixte youre conseilours; this is to seyn, bitwixte youre trewe frendes & youre feyned conseilours; ne ye han nat knowe the wil of youre trewe frendes, olde and wise; but ye han cast alle hire wordes in an hoche pot, and enclyned youre herte to the moore part and to the gretter nombre; and there been ye condescended. And, sith ye woot wel that men shal alwey fynde a gretter nombre of foolles than of wise men, and therefore the conseils that been at congregaciouns and multitudes of folk, thereas men take moore reward to the nombre than to the sapience of persones, ye see wel that in swiche conseillynges foolles han the maistrie.

MELIBEE answerde agayn, and seyde. I graunte wel that I have erred; but thereas thou hast toold me heer bifore, that he nys nat to blame that chaungeth his conseilours in certain caas, and for certein juste causes, I am

al redy to chaunge my conseilours, right as thou wolt devyse. The proverbe seith: that for to do synne is mannyssh, but certes, for to persevere longe in synne is werk of the devel.

This sentence answerde anon dame Prudence, and seyde. Examyneth, quod she, youre conseil and lat us see the whiche of hem han spoken most resonably, and taught yow best conseil. And forasmuche as that the examynacioun is necessarye, lat us bigynne at the surgiens & at the phisiciens that first speken in this matiere. I seye yow, that the surgiens and phisiciens han seyd yow in youre conseil discreetly, as hem oughte; & in hir speche seyden ful wisely, that to the office of hem apertenech to doon to every wight honour and profit, and no wight for to anye; and, in hir craft, to doon greet diligence unto the cure of hem whiche that they han in hir governaunce. And sire, right as they han answered wisely and discreetly, right so rede I that they been heighly & sovereynly guerdoned for hir noble speche; & eek for they sholde do the moore ententif bisynesse in the curacioun of youre doghter deere. For, albeit so that they been youre frendes, therefore shal ye nat suffren that they serve yow for noght; but ye oghte the rather guerdone hem and shewe hem youre largesse.

AND as touchynge the proposicioun which that the phisiciens entreteden in this caas; this is to seyn, that in maladies, that oon contrarie is warissched by another contrarie; I wolde fayn knowe how ye understonde thilke text, and what is youre sentence.

CERTES, quod Melibee, I understonde it in this wise: that right as they han doon me a contrarie, right so sholde I doon hem another. For right as they han venged hem on me and doon me wrong, right so shal I venge me upon hem, and doon hem wrong; and thanne have I cured oon contrarie by another.

O, lo! quod dame Prudence, how lightly is every man enclined to his owene desir and to his owene pleasure! Certes, quod she, the wordes of the phisiciens ne sholde nat han been understonden in this wise. For certes, wikkednesse is nat contrarie to wikkednesse, ne vengeance to vengeance, ne wrong to wrong, but they been semblable; & therefore, o vengeance is nat warissched by another vengeance, ne o wroong by another wroong; but everich of hem encreeseth & aggreggeth oother.

BUT certes, the wordes of the phisiciens sholde been understonden in this wise; for good and wikked-

nesse been two contraries, and pees and werre, vengeance and suffraunce, discord and accord, and manye othere thynges. But certes, wikkednesse shal be warissched by goodnesse, discord by accord, werre by pees, and so forth of othere thynges. And heerto accordeth Seint Paul the Apostle in manye places. He seith; Ne yeldeth nat harm for harm, ne wikked speche for wikked speche; but do wel to hym that dooth thee harm, & blesse hym that seith to thee harm. And in manye othere places he amonesteth pees and accord.

BUT now wol I speke to yow of the conseil which that was yeven to yow by the men of lawe and the wise folk, that seyden alle by oon accord, as ye han herd bifore; that over alle thynges, ye sholde doon your diligence to kepen youre persone & to warnestoore youre hous; and seyden also, that in this caas ye oghten for to werken ful avysely and with greet deliberacioun. And sire, as to the firste point, that toucheth to the kepyng of youre persone; ye shul understonde that he that hath werre shal everemoore mekely and devoutly preyen bifore alle thynges, that Jhesus Crist of his grete mercy wol han hym in his proteccioun & been his sovereyn helpyng at his nede. For certes, in this world ther is no wight that may be consailed ne kept suffisantly withouten the kepyng of oure Lord Jhesu Crist.

This sentence accordeth the prophete David, that seith. If God ne kepe the citee, in ydel waketh he that it kepeth. Now sire, thanne shul ye committe the kepyng of youre persone to youre trewe frendes that been approved and yknowe; and of hem shul ye axen helpe, youre persone for to kepe; for Catoun seith. If thou hast nede of help, axe it of thy frendes; for ther nys noon so good a phisicien as thy trewe freend.

AND after this, thanne shul ye kepe yow fro alle straunge folk, and fro lyeres, & have alwey in suspect hire compaignye; for Piers Alfonse seith. Ne taak no compaignye by the weye of a straunge man, but if so be that thou have knowe hym of a lenger tyme. And if so be that he be falle into thy compaignye, paraventure, withouten thyn assent, enquire thanne as subtilly as thou mayst, of his conversacioun, and of his lyf bifore, and feyne thy wey. Seye that thou goost thider as thou wolt nat go; & if he bereth a spere, hoold thee on the right syde, and if he bere a swerd, hoold thee on the left syde. And after this, thanne shul ye kepe yow wisely from all swich manere peple as I have seyd bifore, and hem and hir conseil eschewe.